THE IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights how interconnected we are globally, and how increasingly vulnerable we are to systemic shocks and risks. The pandemic exacerbates existing humanitarian needs and, if left unchecked threatens to generate additional humanitarian crises of unprecedented magnitude.

It is extremely concerning that some governments are also using this crises to extend their power, exert control and further erode civil society space; ranging from unlimited emergency powers, targeting of critics, inhumane implementation of restrictions, mass digital surveillance by security agencies, and preventing access to reliable health information.

Ireland's recent provision of €10 million in funding to the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan and contribution of €6 million to UNRWA are vital and welcome signals of Ireland's commitment to global solidarity at this extremely challenging time for Irish citizens domestically.

Responding to the pandemic is challenging for political leaders amidst the immediacy of the domestic response to the COVID-19 crisis. It is imperative that as we work to build resilient communities and ensure a global recovery the response is built upon principles of social justice, environmental sustainability, and the protection, respect and fulfilment of human rights.

This briefing outlines the implications of COVID-19 and in the areas of:

1. COVID-19 and Humanitarian Response
2. COVID-19 and Civil Society Space and Human Rights
3. COVID-19 and Food and Nutrition Security
4. COVID-19 and Gender

1. COVID-19: A HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates existing humanitarian needs. Globally,168 million people had already been projected to need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2020. If left unchecked, the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to result in the loss of 40 million people worldwide. [1] Key messages:

- **Urgently and significantly increase humanitarian funding to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.** It is essential that additional funds are mobilized to support the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) for COVID-19, while also continuing to support existing critical humanitarian responses.

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[1]. Imperial College London (2020) 'The Global Impact of COVID-19 and Strategies for Mitigation and Suppression' https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/196496/coronavirus-pandemic-could-have-caused-40/

- **Funding should prioritise localized humanitarian responses, supporting local and national organisations, particularly women-led organisations.** Funding for local organisations must be longer-term, flexible and include adequate support for local organisations to cover overhead costs to cover safety, health insurance and other risk management priorities.

- **Funding of Gender Based Violence (GBV) service provision and protection of women and girls must be prioritised,** including access to GBV services within health settings for women and girls during restrictions and lockdowns, and health and psychosocial support, provided remotely where necessary.

- **Continuing existing humanitarian programmes is vital,** and requires the protection of humanitarian access and access to information within the context of the COVID 19 response.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS UNDER THREAT IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

In many countries where Trócaire is based, civil society organisations and human rights defenders face constraints and threats, ranging from restrictions on their activities and funding, to criminalisation, arbitrary detention, smear campaigns, extreme violence and extrajudicial killings. COVID-19 presents an unprecedented situation: globally governments are suspending a range of civil and political rights in the face of a global public health threat.

The international human rights system provides for this, allowing derogations from certain human rights obligations in a time of public emergency. However, there are clear parameters around these derogations, and the global pandemic should not be used as an opportunity to further erode civil society space in the long-term.[2] Key messages:

- **In many countries civil society organisations and human rights defenders are already under pressure** due to restrictions on their activities, criminalisation, arbitrary detention, smear campaigns, extreme violence and extrajudicial killings.

- **It is extremely concerning that some governments are using this crises to extend their power, exert control and further erode civil society space**; ranging from unlimited emergency powers, targeting of critics, inhumane implementation of restrictions, mass digital surveillance by security agencies, and preventing access to reliable health information.

[2.] Restrictions (derogations from the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights): Must not discriminate against particular minority groups; must not target individuals that the Government view as problematic; must be proportionate and specific to the threats of COVID-19; must adhere to the rule of law; must adopt short term measures with opportunity for review; must be communicated through the intermediary of the Secretary-General of the United Nations; must be terminated when the threat ceases (Art. 4 ICCPR). See European Centre for Not for Profit Law and International Centre for Not for Profit Law for 2 page briefing on what states must do and not do (2020) "Keeping civic space healthy: saving lives & human rights" http://ecnl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/saving-life-and-human-rights-ECNL-ICNL.pdf

- **This global health crisis must not be used as an opportunity to silence critics of government, to strip back human rights or to target particular groups negatively.** Emergency measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 should always be carried out in strict accordance with human rights standards, on a temporary basis, and in a way that is specific and proportionate to the public health risk. Measures should not be enforced using excessive force or in a degrading manner.

- **Governments should put in place measures to mitigate the impact of restrictions on people's economic and social rights**, prioritising marginalised groups, including those at risk of gender based violence.

3. COVID-19 AND LONGER-TERM FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

Globally the state of food security and nutrition in the world before COVID-19 was already alarming. 2019 witnessed a rise in world hunger for the third year in a row, with an estimated 821 million people – one in nine people, living in hunger. David Beasely, head of the Word Food Programme warned at the launch of the Global Food Report on Food Crises that the world is at risk of famines of 'biblical proportions' unless urgent action is taken[3].

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3. BBC News (21 April 2020) 'Coronavirus: World risks 'biblical' famines due to pandemic – UN', https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52373888; see World Food Programme (2020) 'Report on Global Food Crises 2020' https://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises

Key messages:

- **The COVID-19 global health crisis is exacerbating critical situations in food systems** at local, national and global levels and is likely to lead to a new and unprecedented global food crisis.

- **Essential assistance in the short term must support biodiverse and nutritious local food production** and the protection of urban market supply chains.

- **It is essential to strengthen food resilience to future shocks,** prioritising longer term sustainable livelihoods opportunities for the most vulnerable and affected people, including the urban poor, the displaced, rural poor and marginalised small scale farmers.

- **The COVID-19 crisis can be a catalyst for policies at all levels which recognise the centrality of local food systems** in ensuring food security and enhanced resilience to external shocks. Local food systems that are based on regenerative agricultural systems including agroecological approaches.

4. COVID-19 AND GENDER

One in three women experiences physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime. In times of crisis women and girls are at higher risk of Gender Based Violence, and face reduced access to GBV and protection services. Emerging evidence from the COVID-19 response points to increases

in intimate partner violence, and abuse and violence towards female health care workers. Women and girls frequently face an increased burden of care responsibilities, including for family and the elderly. As women make up 70% of the global health workforce, women face the double burden of crisis response as well as caring duties. Evidence from previous health emergencies such as the Ebola crisis and recent outbreaks of SARS, swine flu and bird flu has shown that everyone's income was affected during these crises, but that men's income returned to what they had made pre-outbreak faster than women's income.[4]

When women have less decision-making power than men, either in households or in government, women's needs during an epidemic are less likely to be met[5]. Gender expertise is often lacking in pandemic planning, outbreak response, and post-pandemic recovery. The meaningful participation of women in all levels of decision-making on the crisis response and recovery is necessary for ensuring responses are sensitive to the women's needs.

Key messages:

- **Funding of Gender Based Violence (GBV) service provision and protection of women and girls must be prioritised,** including access to GBV services within health settings for women and girls during restrictions and lockdowns, and health and psychosocial support, provided remotely where necessary.

- **Decision-making processes at all levels of the crisis response and recovery should include a 50% representation of women and their leadership and meaningful participation should be strengthened** in order to ensure responses are sensitive to the different needs of women and girls.

- **Appropriate supports, including the provision of child-care, must be put in place in recognition of the additional care burden faced by women** in the home, community and in frontline work. Preparedness and response plans must be grounded in strong gender analysis and ensure that containment and mitigation measures address the burden of unpaid care work.

- **Ensure targeted women's economic empowerment strategies** to mitigate the impact of the outbreak and its containment measures including supporting them to recover and build resilience for future shocks. Strategies should specifically address women who are in precarious employment.

4. Lewis, H (2020), 'The Coronavirus is a Disaster for Feminism' https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/

5. Davies, S., et. al, 'Why Gender Matters in the Impact and Recovery from COVID-19', https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-gender-matters-impact-and-recovery-covid-19